

GURNET

Independent souls savor island privacy



sitting in her front yard overlooking the sea, Elaine Nudd enjoys the view year-round on Plymouth's remote peninsula community, the Gurnet.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JONATHAN WIGGS

By Heather Sill
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Year-round residents of South Shore outposts enjoy few conveniences, but plenty of privacy

Joan Noble watched nervously from the windows of her tidal island home off Marshfield while the edges of the storm-churned ocean drew closer to her porch steps.

Noble, who owns and operates the Quarter Deck antique shop in Scituate Harbor and lives year-round on Trouant's Island, was about to spend five days stuck there during the "no-name" storm of 1991, until a front-end loader removed the massive

chunks of ice blocking the road back to civilization.

"It keeps you unbalanced, which I don't think is a bad thing," said Noble of her island life and the caprice of the weather. "But there is structure. The tide is structure."

Noble is part of a tiny community of year-round residents of remote peninsula areas and islands along the South Shore. Of-

ficials along the coast estimate fewer than 25 households are part of that community.

Stranded during storms, living with few modern amenities and limited services from outside is a way of life.

Marshfield Fire Chief Roy McNamee said Trouant's Island tests the reflexes of local emergency services since it can only be accessed by one road cut through a salt marsh, and that road is impassable for two hours on each side of high tide.

"Part of it is that these residents want to have a place where there's privacy," he said. "But it is a little extra concern for us ... we've certainly had issues."

McNamee said that over 10 years ago a fire destroyed a house on Trouant's Island during high tide. "The road was flooded and the trucks couldn't get across," said McNamee. "We were able to bring the fire equipment by boat and protect the adjoining properties."

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Elaine Nudd standing outside her home on the Gurnet, where she has lived year-round with her son since 1980.

■ REMOTE

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Duxbury Fire Chief William Harriman said the typical call from Gurnet or Saquish can take 30 minutes to answer - longer in a storm. Gurnet and Saquish, which are part of Plymouth, use Duxbury's emergency services since the peninsula they sit on is only four-wheel drive accessible on one road along the back side of Duxbury Beach.

"It's their choice of lifestyle, but I can't say it's for me," said Harriman. "They clearly understand they don't have emergency, fire, and police around the corner."

Noble, who lives alone, has weathered every storm at her year-round island home since she moved there in 1985.

"It's surprising how much you want to get home," she said. "The ice on the road gets absolutely terrifying; and once you start out here, there's no turning back. You gun your engine to get over it. It's scary as hell."

Noble, who lives around the tides, sometimes loses track of them after a long trip. "I've always been able to get home," said Noble. "I might have to hang out in an all-night supermarket for a few hours, but I get there."

Sometimes, she added, getting home involves driving through a few inches of water or leaving her car on the mainland and wading.

Elaine Nudd, who has spent summers on the Gurnet since she was a child, took up year-round residence on the peninsula with her son, Eric Strom, in 1980.

"When I moved here and woke up in the morning I'd say, 'Yippee, I'm on the Gurnet,'" said Nudd. "When we used to just summer out here when I was a girl I used to cry when we left. The Gurnet is my therapy."

More than 50 homes are clustered on the Gurnet, about eight of which house year-round residents.

The trip to the Gurnet from Powder Point Bridge in Duxbury takes about 10 minutes. With the exception of severe storms that cover the sole passage to the peninsula with waves or ice, the Gurnet can be reached during any tide. During storms, Nudd stays with friends inland to avoid getting stranded.

"If I'm going to be cut off one way or the other, at least I want to be able to go to work," said Nudd, who works in Plymouth as a realtor at Harbor Real Estate in addition to teaching art classes and working as a guide at the Mayflower Society House.

When a storm moves in quickly, Nudd sometimes has no choice but to stay put. "During a storm there is stuff flying through the air - snow, sleet, foam. You can't believe it's the same soft, sunny, and benign Gurnet after you get through something like that."

Noble relies on only the most basic necessities. "In 1985 when I moved here, I had a generator, no electric and no phone," she said. "My big fear was falling and freezing to death."

Three years later, utility lines were run to the island, enabling her to have electricity and a phone. While four of Trouant's Island's 10 homes are now year-round, Noble spent her first winter on the island alone.

Water is drawn into Noble's home from a well and she also has a stove with a heater and a wood burning stove. Noble says these conveniences are more than enough.

While Nudd and Noble travel to and from their homes every day, Bonnie Hobson of Plymouth leaves

Clarke's Island only once a week to work at Towne Country Home Antiques in Boston. Clarke's Island, which is heavily wooded and contains 13 houses, is one mile off the coast of Plymouth. In the winter months, when the harbor freezes over and her 20-minute boat trip is impossible to make, Hobson retreats to her home on the mainland.

"With no electricity and no hot water, you have to love it to put up with the inconveniences day in and day out," said Hobson. "Things take longer. You don't vacuum, you sweep. You don't run out to buy a Sara Lee cake, you make the cake."

Hobson, who lives on the island with Jack, her husband, makes do without a phone or television, but her two-story home does have a generator. If she needs to use a phone for an emergency, Hobson said the homes of her aunt and her mother are within yelling distance.

Hobson's family has lived on the island since 1690. Her grandmother, who lived on Clarke's Island until the age of five, was the last generation of her family to live there 12 months a year.

"You're more in tune with things that are really important and you don't play Pavlov's dog to the phone," said Hobson of her island life. "I like the quiet and having the time to figure out what bird song it is."

While Clarke's Island has its share of songbirds, Trouant's Island was recently home to a pair of osprey and the Gurnet plays host to snowy arctic owls some winters.

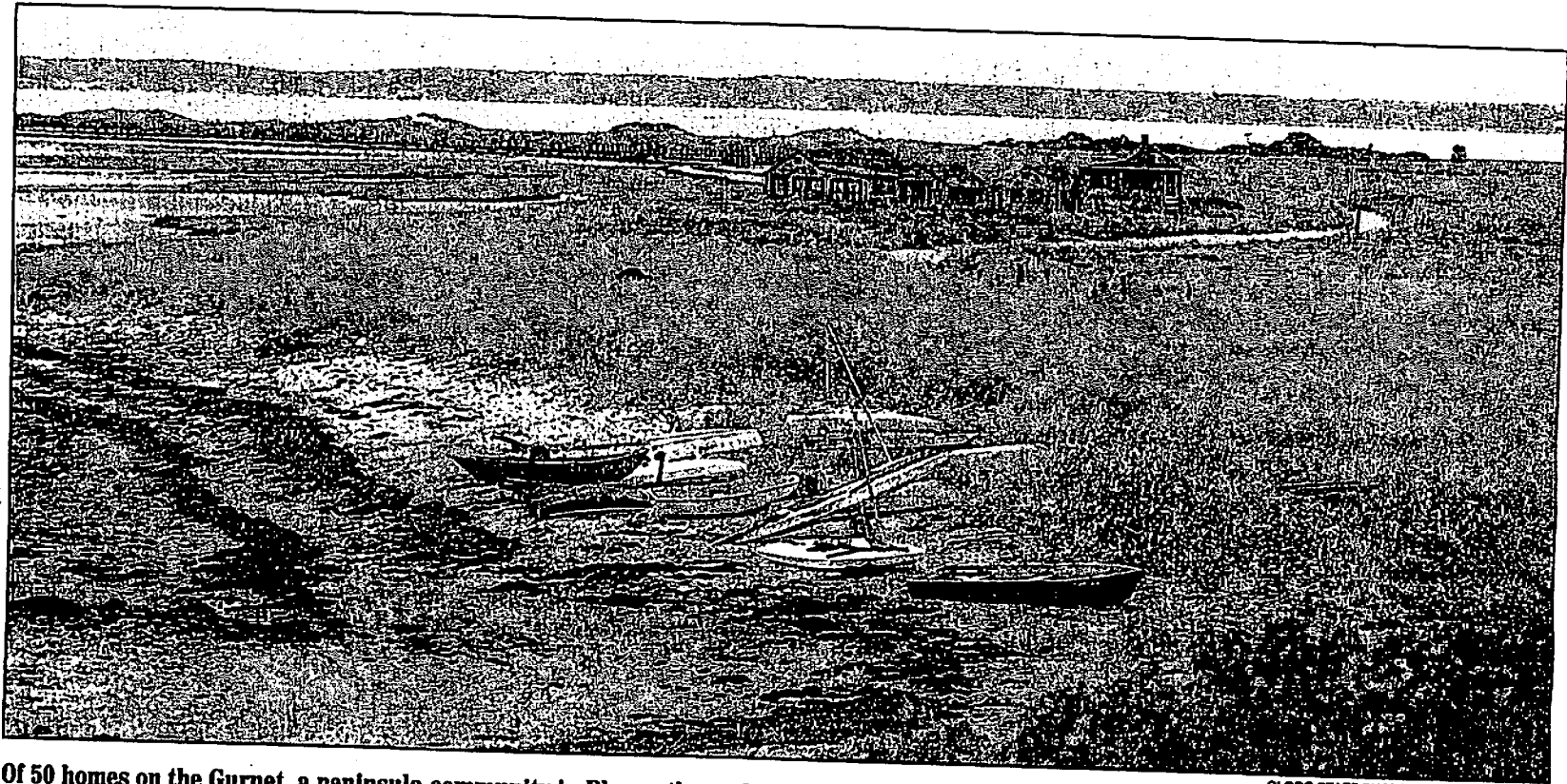
"We have orioles and we had an eagle," said Noble. "You can watch the migration of birds and see seals come in with the tide." Noble's cottage on Trouant's Island lies about 100 feet from the ocean overlooking the mouth of the North River and the base of Fourth Cliff in Scituate.

"There's a certain magic," said Noble, surveying the water from her porch chair. "This is as good as it gets."

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Independent souls savor life on the islands



Of 50 homes on the Gurnet, a peninsula community in Plymouth reached via Duxbury Beach, about eight house year-round residents.

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